The Middlebury Campus

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IAN BAUCOM NAMED 18TH PRESIDENT OF MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

JENEENE CHATOWSKY / UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Baucom will be a tenured professor of English at the college upon his inauguration in July. "I think I can firmly say that that I absolutely plan to teach," he said.

By RYAN McELROY & MADELEINE KAPTEIN
Editor in Chief & Managing Editor

Ian Baucom, the provost of the University of Virginia (UVA), will serve as the 18th President of Middlebury College. The college announced his selection for the presidency at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 22, after a unanimous recommendation by the Presidential Search Committee was affirmed by the Board of Trustees on Tuesday afternoon. He will assume the office on July 1, 2025.

Baucum has held his current position at UVA since 2022, prior to which he worked for eight years as Dean of its College and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. During his tenure at the state's flagship, the incoming president previously worked as the Robert C. Taylor Professor of English; he has also taught at Yale University and served as chair of the English Department at Duke University.

"I love the mission of Middlebury, I love residential liberal arts education," Baucom said in an exclusive interview with The Campus on Tuesday. "I'm looking forward to learning how to ski, but really the student experience and getting to know the faculty and being in this place is what's drawn me to Middlebury."

Middlebury's 18th President

Baucom — who grew up in South Africa — expressed his excitement at the idea of joining a small liberal arts community at Middlebury after spending his undergraduate years in a similar environment at Wake Forest University. He lived in a first year dormitory on UVA's campus

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Two of three Honor Code amendments pass, reflecting shifting academic culture

By RACHELLE TALBERT
Contributing Writer

After months of deliberation and an extended voting period, over two-thirds of Middlebury students voted in favor of two of the three proposed changes to the Honor Code. The results, which Dean of Students Joe Russell announced on Jan. 14, removed the moral obligation to report Honor Code violations and implemented a sliding scale of penalties for violations, with 73.4% and 89.2% of voting students answering yes, respectively. The proposal to allow professors to proctor exams did not pass, receiving only 45.8% support.

In conducting the vote, the review committee — composed of faculty, Student Government Association (SGA) and administrators — told The Campus how ambitious of a task it was to reach a two-thirds vote threshold from the students.

"We knew that SGA [Student Government Association]

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SNOW BOWL HIKES PASS PRICES BY 90%, PLANS TO INSTALL RFID SYSTEM

By MAGGIE BRYAN & HANNA FREUND
Senior News Editor & Contributing Writer

Changes are coming to The Middlebury Snow Bowl this year, which is in the full swing of its 91st season. A Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) system will be installed over the summer, which will require visitors to scan their passes to ride the chair lift next season. The Snow Bowl also raised ticket and season pass prices for the 2024–25 season — daytime passes for college students have increased from $99 to $189, and a pass for both day and night is now $239. Pass prices for adults and other age groups have also seen increases, but Middlebury first years can still ski for free.

The Snow Bowl also welcomed a new General Manager this season, Kim Essensa. She brings over 25 years of experience working in the ski industry from Maine to Wyoming. Essensa most recently worked as the guest experience manager at Dartmouth Skiway, the only other college-owned ski area in the country.

"It's been my dream to be a general manager at a small ski area, and working for a college is honestly the best," Essensa

MAGGIE BRYAN/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The Middlebury Snow Bowl has not seen a decrease in pass sales since raising its prices this season.

said in an interview with The Campus. In addition to running the Snow Bowl, she will oversee the addition of the RFID system this summer, which Essensa said will provide valuable data.

"RFID is fantastic for so many different reasons. It collects data, so we can actually see where our guests are

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FLORA SUES VERMONT CANNABIS CONTROL BOARD OVER ADVERTISING REGULATIONS

NADIA HARE/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

By VIOLET WEXLER
Contributing Writer

FLŌRA, the cannabis store on Park Street in downtown Middlebury, has filed a lawsuit against the Vermont Cannabis Control Board (CCB) over cannabis advertisement regulations it claims are unconstitutional. In the suit filed in Addison Superior Court on Dec. 9, 2024, FLŌRA argued that Vermont businesses are being harmed financially by the restrictive regulations and requirements for advertisement approval, infringing upon their right to free speech.

Under Vermont Law, all cannabis stores must submit their advertisements to the CCB for approval before they can be published. This process ensures that ads do not appeal to or endanger the health of younger audiences — content featuring cartoons and candy, for example, are often rejected. According to the law, cannabis establishments must not advertise their products at all unless they can prove that no more than 15% of their customer base is expected to be under 21 years of age. Advertisements must also contain health warnings adopted by the control board.

The rules for approval require cannabis businesses to submit

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with his family for three years, followed by five years living with students on the famous UVA lawn, so he is no stranger to tight-knit residential life.

"A lot of it is learning from the richness of that, the relationships that we were able to build with students. I love the idea of having a class of 600 students, ideally all of whose names I would like to get to know," Baucom said.

This July, he will assume responsibility for an institution that has grown in scope and resources during the past decade. However, Middlebury continues to face serious challenges that he will be tasked with leading the college through — over-enrollment, employee compensation and understaffing, A.I. and the Honor Code, threats to higher education, and town-gown relations are just a few he may confront.

"Part of what drew me to Middlebury was how deeply, as I understand it, that the college is committed to the town of Middlebury," he explained, when asked about his desire to work with the town of Middlebury. Baucom added how he recently toured the new childcare center in town as well as the site for the future affordable housing center. "That is going to be an important part of trying to build and strengthen that relationship."

Baucom has experience with leading an institution through difficult periods. He helped lead UVA's response and grieving process as Provost when an active shooter killed three football players and wounded two other students in November 2022. While in his previous role of Dean of Arts & Sciences in 2017, he helped the university respond when a group of white supremacists marched through UVA's campus, and then guided students through the Covid-19 pandemic. More recently last spring, the UVA administration received pushback for their decision to use state police force to clear the pro-Palestinian encampment on UVA's campus.

Last December, before her tenure ended, President Emerita Laurie Patton shared her concerns surrounding Trump's re-election in November, adding that the new president must be focused on preventing Trump's policies from hampering international students' access to a Middlebury education.

"The main thing we need to do is think about protecting our students now in anticipation of what might happen, which is the art of administration," Patton said at the time.

Baucom largely shares that emphasis on the students, adding that the values of Middlebury College must not depend on political pressure or successive presidential administrations.

"Political moments change, and different parties are in power at different moments. But what is really, really crucial is to understand what the values of the institution are and to understand the value of the dignity of all human persons," he said.

Having helped lead UVA through one such political moment — the recent Supreme Court decision outlawing affirmative action — Baucom reflected on the moral imperative to maintain a diverse student body at Middlebury, noting how the challenge will be different when he leads a smaller private institution in Vermont.

"We will follow the law, and we will do everything within our power to recruit and support the most diverse student body we possibly can," Baucom said. He cited UVA's progress recruiting from lower-income high schools in the state as a potential lens to consider the relationship between the college and its applicant pool.

As an administrator at UVA, he believes in recognizing the ubiquity of A.I. and asking students and faculty to reflect on best practices for its uses across disciplines, which he will continue to explore at Middlebury.

"A.I. as an instrument of teaching and research is part of the world that we live in now," he explained. "I think the heart of taking the best and most creative advantage of the affordances of artificial intelligence really comes from asking the right kinds of questions."

JENEENE CHATOWSKY / UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"Thinking of the new museum as an arts agora, where art and democracy and the possibility of life come together is great," Baucom said in an interview with The Campus on Tuesday, describing the building intended to replace Battell Hall. "I can't wait for that space to be open."

Although his background is primarily in English literature, with a focus on colonial and post-colonial texts, the 57-year-old Provost has also worked on projects expanding UVA's offerings for neuroscience and biotechnology, global black studies, climate change, and artificial intelligence.

Baucom, who will be a tenured Professor of English at Middlebury when he begins as president, has climate change consistently on his mind — a fitting mindset for the president of a university with the first-ever environmental studies department. When he eventually teaches classes at Middlebury, he hopes to cover the intersection of literature and climate studies.

"The Climate of History in a Planetary Age" by Dipesh Chakrabarty is one book Baucom said he has been reading recently that has been particularly influential on his thinking about our planet. He connected his studies of the environment on the importance of climate change within the "Big M" — Middlebury Language Schools, the Institute for International Studies at Monterey (MIIS), and the Vermont campus.

The Presidential Search Process

The process that led the Presidential Search Committee to Baucom was launched in June 2024 with Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees Kirtley Cameron '95 at its helm. The Board chose the executive search firm Isaacon, Miller and an 18-member committee composed of trustees, faculty, staff, alumni and one student to conduct an expeditious, closed search.

Beginning to evaluate 27 candidates brought in by the search firm in October, the committee quickly and carefully narrowed down its candidates to 11 semi-finalists to be interviewed over Zoom in December. Of these candidates, four were people of color and five were women.

They then invited three finalists and their spouses to campus in the first week of January for continued interviews with the committee, more intimate social meals with only Cameron and Ted Truscott '83, chair of the Board of Trustees, and tours of campus and the town of Middlebury.

Cameron and Truscott said that the standout quality of Baucom's cover letter enticed the committee from the outset and enthused them to meet him in person.

"I think his true, genuine curiosity about Middlebury came out from the beginning. He is a professional, but an engaging and warm and empathetic person," Kirtley said.

According to Cameron and Truscott, the committee was able to create a harmony between trusting, respecting and challenging one another in conversations about choosing from a strong pool of candidates — conversations that led them to the unanimous decision of Baucom.

"I think when it got to the final deliberation after we'd seen each candidate, it wasn't difficult," Cameron said.

Truscott spoke about why he thinks the committee ultimately landed on Baucom to serve as Middlebury's next president.

"Part of his desire to get back to the liberal arts and a smaller institution is the students and the faculty and being more engaged on a day-to-day basis with both undergraduate students and graduate students and faculty. I mean, just more interaction on a day-to-day basis," Truscott said. "I think that bode very well for all of us and in who we were looking for as our next leader."

Past, Present and Future of the Presidency

Middlebury has been searching for its next leader for the last six months since President Emerita Laurie Patton retired last spring, capping a nearly 10-year career leading the college. She departed the college to serve as the next President of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, an institution that she and Baucom share — he was elected to the Academy in 2021, three years after her own induction. The 17th and 18th presidents also overlapped during their time at Duke, when Baucom said Patton served as the dean for his college at the time.

Interim President Steve Snyder will depart his current role on June 30, 2025 after leading the institution for a few short months, allowing Baucom to step into his new position and begin to forge his legacy as Middlebury's 18th President for years to come.

When asked if he had a message to students, staff and faculty at the college, Baucom expressed his gratitude for being welcomed into a community as dedicated and curious as what he has found at Middlebury.

"Thank you for who you are," Baucom said. "Thank you for inviting Wendy and our family to join you. We are really grateful,

Outdoor groups promote inclusive winter activities at Snow Bowl

By HUGO ZHANG
Online Editor

On Jan. 17, The Middlebury Snow Bowl hosted a Fostering Inclusive Recreation Experience (FIRE) event at the bowl for the second year in a row, providing BIPOC students with free transportation, ski lessons, equipment rentals and passes for a night of skiing. FIRE is a student organization with the mission of reducing barriers to outdoor sports for marginalized groups at Middlebury. The club leads outdoor trips year-round that involve hiking, backpacking, ice skating, fishing, skiing and ice climbing.

The event's success was the result of collaboration between several members of the Middlebury community, Ruby Warner '24.5, president of FIRE, told The Campus in an email.

"We collaborated with the Snowbowl to provide ski lessons and rentals to as many BIPOC students as possible. With help from PALANA, MCAB, and the DEI office we are able to offer rentals and lessons to 50 students," Warner wrote.

Last year, Kamryn You Mak '23.5, founder of FIRE, and Elise Chan '24 organized the same event and were able to support 30 students. Warner wrote that this year, FIRE offered 50 spots that filled up in 15 minutes.

"It is clear that BIPOC students at Midd want to get involved in snow sports, but the financial and social barriers are preventing this," Warner wrote. "The price of mountain passes is insanely expensive and only increasing."

She also mentioned the high expense of gear, warm clothing and winter sports lessons.

Middlebury Outdoor Programs (MOP) Assistant Rick Walker '27.5 wrote in an email to The Campus that while he thinks Middlebury is lucky to have the Snow Bowl and Rikert Outdoor Center, he worries that the Middlebury Snow Bowl is no longer the most affordable place for Middlebury students to enjoy winter sports. Snow Bowl prices were raised this season and a daytime season pass for a college student now costs $189 compared with the previous $99. He pointed out that at the nearby Mad River Glen, a ski resort in Vermont's Mad River Valley, a daytime pass for college students costs a comparatively cheaper $169 for college students.

Apart from the high cost of winter sports, the predominantly white population of skiers poses the challenge of potential alienation to underrepresented students interested in outdoor activities.

"Snow sports are an extremely white-dominated space that can be intimidating to anyone who is new, even to people who have gone before," Warner wrote.

The president of FIRE pointed out that as a predominately white institution, Middlebury may unintentionally discourage BIPOC students from participating in outdoor sports.

"[FIRE's] goal is to create a safe space outdoors for BIPOC students while also building a community," she wrote.

While the event's goal was simple, organizing this year's event was not an entirely smooth process, Walker told The Campus.

"FIRE club's budget is not huge, especially compared to other bigger clubs. Ruby did a really good job reaching out to a batch of other campus partners to provide support outside of their own budget," he wrote.

Funding and marketing are often big issues for event organizers. David Wilder, director of Programming and Events at the college, and Rich Connell, assistant director of MOP, mentioned that the increase in interest in outdoor activities has not been met with an increase in resources.

"We are always moving the needle forward; however, it's fair to say our approach has been incremental due to a steady increase in participation and demand while human and financial resources remain static," Connell wrote.

Walker echoed this struggle.

"The whole point of [MOP] is to give people who want to be outside the opportunity to," Walker wrote. "But we can only do so much with the resources we're given by the college."

Will Hinkle '26, former president of Middlebury Mountain Club (MMC), agreed with Walker, adding that the college itself does little to promote outdoor access outside of student organizations.

"The college exclusively depends on organizations like FIRE and MMC to push forward their mission to include more people to the outdoor activities, which is true but really depends on a select group of student leaders they are accomplishing on their behalf and not necessarily with any support from the college other than just the Student Activities Office is just doing their normal job," Hinkle said.

Despite these challenges, Connell attested to MOP's ongoing commitment to promoting inclusion.

"I can say with confidence that the MOP staff and their partners will continue to collaborate, advocate for additional support, and make progress toward a future state with far fewer barriers to accessing winter sports," he wrote.

Middlebury's picturesque mountain setting offers students unparalleled opportunities to embrace outdoor sports, especially at the Snow Bowl — one of only two college-owned ski areas in the U.S. Yet, as barriers to accessibility persist, particularly for underrepresented groups, clubs like FIRE believe it is important that the college community remain committed to fostering inclusivity and equity on the slopes.

COURTESY PHOTO/ RUBY WARNER

Students at the FIRE event at the Snow Bowl on Jan. 17 gather for a photo.

TWO OF THREE HONOR CODE AMENDMENTS PASS, REFLECTING SHIFTING ACADEMIC CULTURE

SKILES ROBERTS-SALVADORE / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The Honor Code Review Committee has recommended exploring the return of a signing ceremony for first years at Convocation in the chapel.

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elections typically see turnout under 50% and so that getting 66.7% was a significant challenge," the committee members wrote to The Campus.

In the end, the effort of students distributing flyers to all student doors brought the vote to 68.7%, just surpassing the committee's goal. These results still must be ratified by the faculty to become official, which the HCRC hopes will happen during the spring semester. Certain changes, however, can be implemented more quickly, the committee members stated.

"Some of the recommendations we made, such as '1. Publicly and regularly define and affirm the meaning and importance of academic integrity' and including AI in the definition of plagiarism do not involve changing the Constitution of the Undergraduate Honor System, and therefore do not require a student vote," they wrote.

The proposal to allow proctoring of exams across all disciplines — currently the Economics department is the only one empowered to supervise test-taking due to rampant cheating — proved to be too controversial for the student body, despite the committee's hope that it would pass.

"The moral obligation to report another for cheating, which is included in our current Honor Code, is generally understood to be unrealistic," the review committee members wrote.

Visiting Assistant Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry Kristina Shrestha raised some potential benefits of having professors proctor exams — the only item which the recent referendum rejected — that the student body might have overlooked.

"Having in-site is to provide support for students when they have questions or are not sure. An instructor's single nod can boost their confidence," Shrestha said.

She expressed how, although it might not be immediately noticeable, having certain rules such as proctoring exams can give students more accountability to learn.

"[The] Honor Code is a delicate topic that needs to be addressed as integrity and not a tool of advantage. The gravity of the Honor Code is sometimes a heavy burden for young adults," she explained.

Still, Shrestha made it clear that such a change would only be effective with the consent of the students. Moving forward, the HCRC plans to conduct faculty votes on the proposed changes while it continues to assess the effectiveness of the Honor Code.

"We are also advocating for changes in current practices based on the recommendations in the report, such as reinstituting the Honor Code signing ceremony during orientation," they wrote.

Though changes have not yet been implemented, students told The Campus that this outcome indicates a shifting academic culture at Middlebury.

"All the change in the Honor Code did was reflect reality," said Dominick Hutchens '28.

Having voted in favor of all three proposed changes, Hutchens explained that, while accountability is important, he feels empathy has become more of a priority in the Middlebury community.

Although most Middlebury students report having broken the Honor Code. For Zeitgeist 6.0 in 2024, students reported that they typically did not expect to face consequences for an Honor Code violation or feel the need to report a classmate.

Another student, Natalie Martinez '28, shared her views on the mental burden that coursework places on students, adding that brief lapses in judgment do not mean that a student lacks the intrinsic motivation to learn.

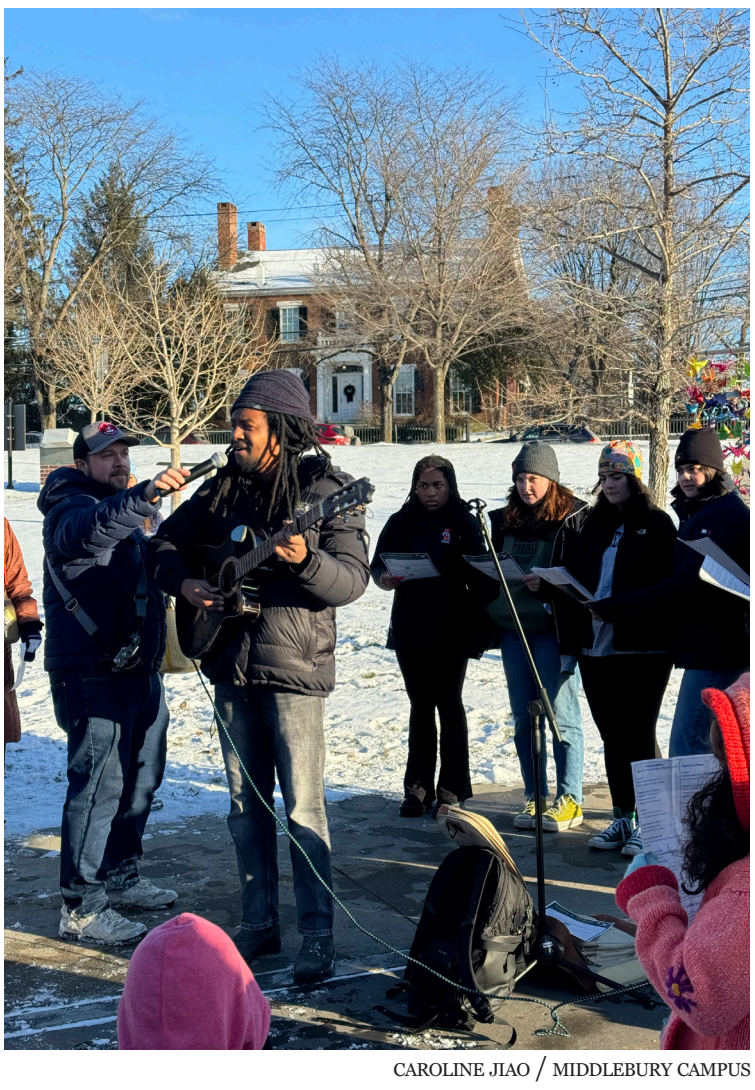
"No one who wants to get a degree is going to cheat on everything," Martinez said.

In discussing how the proposal to allow professors the ability to proctor exams did not pass, Sam Lueke '28 emphasized the importance of trust within the Middlebury community. They felt the trust given to students by professors — knowing that they have learning at the forefront of their minds — benefits the academic culture at Middlebury. Having voted against professor exam proctoring, Lueke values this bond between faculty and students.

"It's a positive thing that we feel like we can trust our students to be more interested in learning material than getting good grades," Lueke said.

TOWN-GOWN EVENT HONORS MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.'S LEGACY THROUGH ART, SPEECH AND SONG

By CAROLINE JIAO
News Editor



CAROLINE JIAO / MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Baker-Médard strumming his guitar and singing at the event on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Approximately 75 people gathered in Middlebury College Park on Jan. 20, a brisk Monday, to honor the enduring legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The event — titled "Flights to Freedom" and taking place on the same day as President Donald Trump's inauguration — was a collaborative effort organized by the Anderson Freeman Resource Center, the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) and the Charles P. Scott Center for Spiritual and Religious Life.

"I think we're really fortunate this year that it was a collaborative effort across a number of different centers," said Jason Duquette-Hoffman, assistant director of the Privilege & Poverty Academic Cluster at the CCE and the event organizer. "We're all motivated to do something both within our capacity and meaningful."

Duquette-Hoffman delivered opening remarks, setting the tone for an event that seeks to transcend the boundaries of Middlebury College, drawing in members from the wider community.

"There was a shared commitment to making this a broader community event and not just something that we do on Middlebury's campus," Duquette-Hoffman added. "It was nice to be able to see that through."

The program began with readings from Dr. King's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech delivered by two students from Oratory Now.

"I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality," one student read. King's words resonated across the park, reminding the audience of the enduring relevance of his message.

Antonio "Naunau" Baker-Médard, program coordinator of the CCE's Projects for Peace, followed with a performance of his original song "Freedom." Written seven years ago, the song is a poignant reflection on his personal experiences from his homeland, Madagascar.

"I'm from Madagascar, a developing country, one of the biggest islands with tons of resources, but unfortunately because of neocolonialism, the country has never gone far economically," Baker-Médard shared. "There seems [to be] a lack of freedom for the people of Madagascar to express themselves because of the corruption of politicians and the power of the countries of the [global] north."

As Baker-Médard strummed his guitar and sang, the audience joined in to sing in support of his voice.

Adding to the musical offerings, the Middlebury Union High School (MUHS) choir also performed a song after the event coordinators had contacted them last Wednesday.

"We put it together quickly, and it was fun to see how many people were interested in our choir," said Annan Duquette-Hoffman, a current sophomore at MUHS.

"It's an empowering experience to go to one of these events. You don't often get to be involved in events like this because it's such a small town, but when there's one around, it's really the best. It felt amazing to be part of it," fellow choir member Greta Suter added.

The event also featured an art installation made of paper cranes, a symbol of peace and hope. The installation, set to be displayed at Davis Library, invited attendees to contribute by folding their own cranes. Community members can continue to participate by donating cranes at the Ilsley Library or Davis Library.

As the event drew to a close, attendees lingered, engaging in conversations and reflecting on the themes of the day. As global and national challenges continue to test the resilience of communities, the attendees said that events like "Flights to Freedom," despite their small scale, not only push Middlebury to reflect on ways to address historical injustice but also serve as vital reminders of the importance of coming together to honor the past while envisioning a more equitable future.

"It's about giving us our freedom to live freely, to enjoy our country, to benefit from our country," Baker-Médard said, capturing the spirit of the event. "Dr. King's legacy reminds us that the fight for freedom and justice is universal, and it's a fight that continues today."

Snowbowl welcomes new manager, raises ticket prices, and plans for new RFID system

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coming from and really what aligns with their needs the best," she said. "Right now, we have no way to track our skier visits. That [tracking] is huge to us and the industry in general, being able to track skier visits, to understand staffing and how our business ebbs and flows throughout the season."

Current Snow Bowl policies require visitors to display their day or season pass to Snow Bowl employees monitoring the line to the lift, according to lift operator Tess Hegarty '25.5. However, Hegarty said it is generally well-known that students often manage to avoid getting their pass checked and ski without a pass. With the addition of RFID technology, this will no longer be possible.

Many ski areas now use RFID technology, making the Snow Bowl somewhat late to the game. Most RFID systems work by scanning a credit-card-sized pass in the pocket on the skier's left side at upper arm height. The chip in the card informs the lift system of the skier's identity and opens the gate to the chairlift. Some RFID systems also track the skier's movement throughout their time on the mountain, offering the benefit of safety if a skier becomes lost.

"We're a little bit behind the times right now as far as that goes, so this will really get us into the next step," said Essensa.

The Snow Bowl initiated changes to ticket prices before Essensa's arrival, but she explained the college's rationale for the increases.

"I like to look at other mountains that are similar to us, other mountains that have night skiing, and really take that into account when we put our pricing out," she said.

Despite major price changes, Essensa mentioned that season pass sales are up from last year and the Snow Bowl has not received complaints about the price increases.

The mountain has also joined IndyPass, a season pass that allows holders access to multiple independent ski resorts. Pass holders receive two free lift tickets at over 230 member resorts and 50% off any additional day passes at the Snow Bowl, Essensa shared, adding that she is excited about the opportunities and the new exposure she hopes the IndyPass will create.

"We're seeing new clientele here, you know, the new families in the lodge, and [we're] really tapping into that new database," Essensa said.

Another addition to the Snow Bowl's offerings is Friday Night Skin Club, which met for the first time on Jan. 17. Piper Harring '25 started the club with the hope of channeling the community-driven, outdoor-enthused qualities that she views as central to the Snow Bowl's identity.

"My goal with this [the club] is to get more people outside, involved in skinning, and part of the Snow Bowl community. At the end of the day, this is about being outside with friends," Harring wrote in an email to The Campus.

The Snow Bowl is in its second year of offering night skiing and its updated Sheehan chair lift. Aside from big changes, Essensa said the Snow Bowl is focused on going back to the basics, which for her, includes a commitment to inclusivity.

"Keeping skiing attainable and approachable for everyone is really our goal here, because we are at a super cool location, owned by the college, we have this great opportunity to get people here," she said.

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Addison County schools weigh parent complaints, controversy over gender-related children's books

By LANGAN GARRETT
Contributing Writer

In early December, two parents at Middlebury's Mary Hogan Elementary School filed a complaint against the school regarding the implementation of gender-related materials and books used in the kindergarten curriculum. The initial complaint has sparked fierce debate at recent school board meetings and further review by the superintendent and school board, who are still in the process of weighing a potential ban.

The books cited in the complaint included "They He She Me: Free to be!" by Maya Christina Gonzales and Matthew Smith Gonzales, "Bodies are Cool" by Tyler Feder, "It Feels Good to Be Yourself" by Theresa Thorn, "Julián is A Mermaid" by Jessica Love, "Introducing Teddy" by Jessica Walton, "Sparkle Boy" by Lesléa Newman and "Fred Gets Dressed" by Peter Brown, according to the Addison Independent.

"Challenges to books and other instructional materials come along periodically and are processed carefully," wrote Emily Blistein, the ACSD director of communications and engagement, in a Dec. 9 email to the Addison Independent.

In response, members of the local transgender community and allies rallied against the proposed book ban in an effort to urge the Addison Central School District (ACSD) board to deny the request to ban several books that allow for kindergarteners to understand gender identity, according to the Addison Independent. Community members, parents and students at Middlebury College expressed strong emotions as they presented their own perspectives on the potential ban.

Members of the local Middlebury community were able to contribute public comments at a recent board meeting on Jan. 6. Several attendees expressed concerns about the possible medical and legal ramifications of allowing these books to remain in classrooms.

"My concern is certainly for the health of the individuals, but also for potential liability for the school district in the future, especially if a policy is followed that would encourage the use of these agents without obtaining proper informed consent from the parents," said Mario Capparuccini, a physician at Porter Hospital who did not mention any current experience with treating children or transgender people.

Board member Steve Orchez and Superintendent Wendy Baker pushed back on the idea that Addison County schools are teaching students about their gender, or trying to encourage gender transitions.

"There is a conspiracy theory that is currently floating around out there, that schools are administering hormone injections for students that are unsafe," Orchez stated. "We don't have enough nursing resources to hand out aspirin. We're not changing people's genders."

"Or even talking about it," Baker added.

Physicians, Addison County students, parents of transgender individuals, local activists and other people from the Middlebury community previously spoke at a Dec. 16 meeting, with most advocating in favor of keeping the books available to children at Mary Hogan.

"The First Amendment.... is so important, but not just including for the people trying to ban this book. It makes me wonder why they try to ban books?" asked Rory MacDonald, a seventh-grade student in Cornwall, Vt. "Books are an author's voice, their opinions and so to take this away would be violating their rights."

Other local residents spoke out against the book removal as well, urging the board to reject the complaint and to ensure students have access to the disputed texts.

"A small group of parents should not dictate what other people's children are allowed to read," said Emily Bissonette of Colchester, Vt.

Another speaker, John Watson of Middlebury, Vt., shared his observations on raising a now-grown child who identifies as transgender.

"My child didn't grow up thinking that she was born in the wrong," Watson shared. "We need not have a curriculum that advances transgender ideology simply to recognize that there are people with different positions on the spectrum of gender identity."

Some public comments disagreed on the necessity for books to be included in school curriculum, arguing that families are responsible for conversations about gender and identity with their children.

"Vermont Family Alliance believes that the family is a sacred institution," said Renee McGinness, a resident of Moncton, Vt. and member of the Vermont Family Alliance. "It's not a question of whether or not parents and children need to have these kinds of discussions over gender... but it's about who should be directing these conversations."

Social media has been a focus for the different narratives represented in the conflict. Memes and Facebook pages have been used for the dissemination of the different arguments on both sides, according to the Addison Independent.

MiddPride, a local LGBTQ advocacy group, also attended the ACSD meeting and voiced their opposition to the ban.

"Book bans that target gender diverse storylines are a blatant attempt to erase trans and gender diverse people from our classrooms. Our community is clear: trans people belong, and these books do too," MiddPride wrote in a Dec. 14 Instagram post.

Other local activist groups have weighed in as well on the contentious topic in recent weeks.

"The NAACP strongly condemns any attempt to ban books, especially for elementary students, as it undermines students' fundamental right to access diverse ideas and perspectives," wrote Mia Schulz, president of the Rutland Area NAACP in a Dec. 9 statement. "We strongly urge the Superintendent and the school board to deny this request and make clear their support for a diverse and welcoming learning environment for all students."

The appeal has not yet been decided by the superintendent, but when a decision is reached, the parents may appeal again, which will go to the ACSD school board for the final decision.

"Dr. Baker indicated that she likely won't be able to issue a decision until after critical FY26 budget development work is complete after January 17th," wrote Mary Noble, a member of the school board, in an email to The Campus.

Editor's Note: Editor in Chief Ryan McElroy '25 and Managing Editor Madeleine Kaptein '25.5 contributed reporting to this article.

TOAD HALL FLOWERS TO MOVE INTO LARGER MARBLE WORKS LOCATION

By MANDY BERGHELA
Senior Local Editor

This spring, Toad Hall Flowers will relocate from Main Street to a larger space in the lower level of Marble Works, nestled in Printers Alley with a scenic view of Otter Creek. With a strong commitment to community engagement and sustainability, Toad Hall Flowers has become much more than just a typical flower shop.

The shop offers not only beautiful floral arrangements but also promotes eco-friendly practices throughout the Middlebury community. Owner and founder of Toad Hall Flowers Peter Cousineau is thrilled about the upcoming move and the newest additions to his business.

"The hope is to have outdoor café tables and also to obtain a beer and wine license to serve drinks to customers," Cousineau said in an interview with The Campus. "I can see the vision — like you're in a garden, sipping wine and then afterward heading to Flatbread for dinner."

Originally from Colorado and Upstate New York, Cousineau relocated to Vermont in the late 1990s after the 1998 ice storm that struck regions from his latter home-state to central Maine. With the help of a friend, he established himself in the area and, in 2010, founded Four Pillars Farm — an organic vegetable farm in Whiting, Vt. situated between the towns of Cornwall and Shoreham — which he ran for a decade.

"I decided to take a break in 2019," Cousineau said. "Then in 2021, I turned one of the small houses I had been using as a wash-and-pack area for the vegetable farm into guest suites. Now, I have two of them, which I call Four Pillars Farmstead."

Cousineau's expertise in landscaping and design plays a significant role in creating memorable experiences for his guests. Rather than arranging perennials in traditional rows, he designs dynamic, visually captivating landscapes that leave a lasting impression on those staying in the suites surrounding the flower farm.

This dedication to thoughtful, sustainable design extends to Cousineau's work as a florist.

"There is a whole movement for sustainable floristry," Cousineau said. "Like a lot of industries, there is a dirty side, and floristry is no exception to that, so we do not use any of the traditional flower foam."

Last summer, he decided to take his flowers beyond the farm and into the community. By chance, the florist had driven through the Middlebury Summer Market on his way home. It piqued his interest and he got permission from the Better Middlebury Partnership, the civic organization that runs the market, to sell flowers there.

After his experience at the market, Cousineau began considering opening a flower shop in town.

"The response was overwhelmingly positive in the summer market," Cousineau said. "However, I was unsure how people would feel about the flowers in town."

To test the waters, he entered a three-month subletting agreement with the jewelry store Elli Parr, taking over their space on Main Street. This temporary arrangement marked the beginning of Toad Hall Flowers.

"I was still gauging with how people felt about the flowers," Cousineau said. "But the response has been great, absolutely fantastic. I keep hearing people say you're the talk of the town, and I never really expected it!"

However, the new small-business owner said that the Main Street space doesn't quite fit Toad Hall's needs.

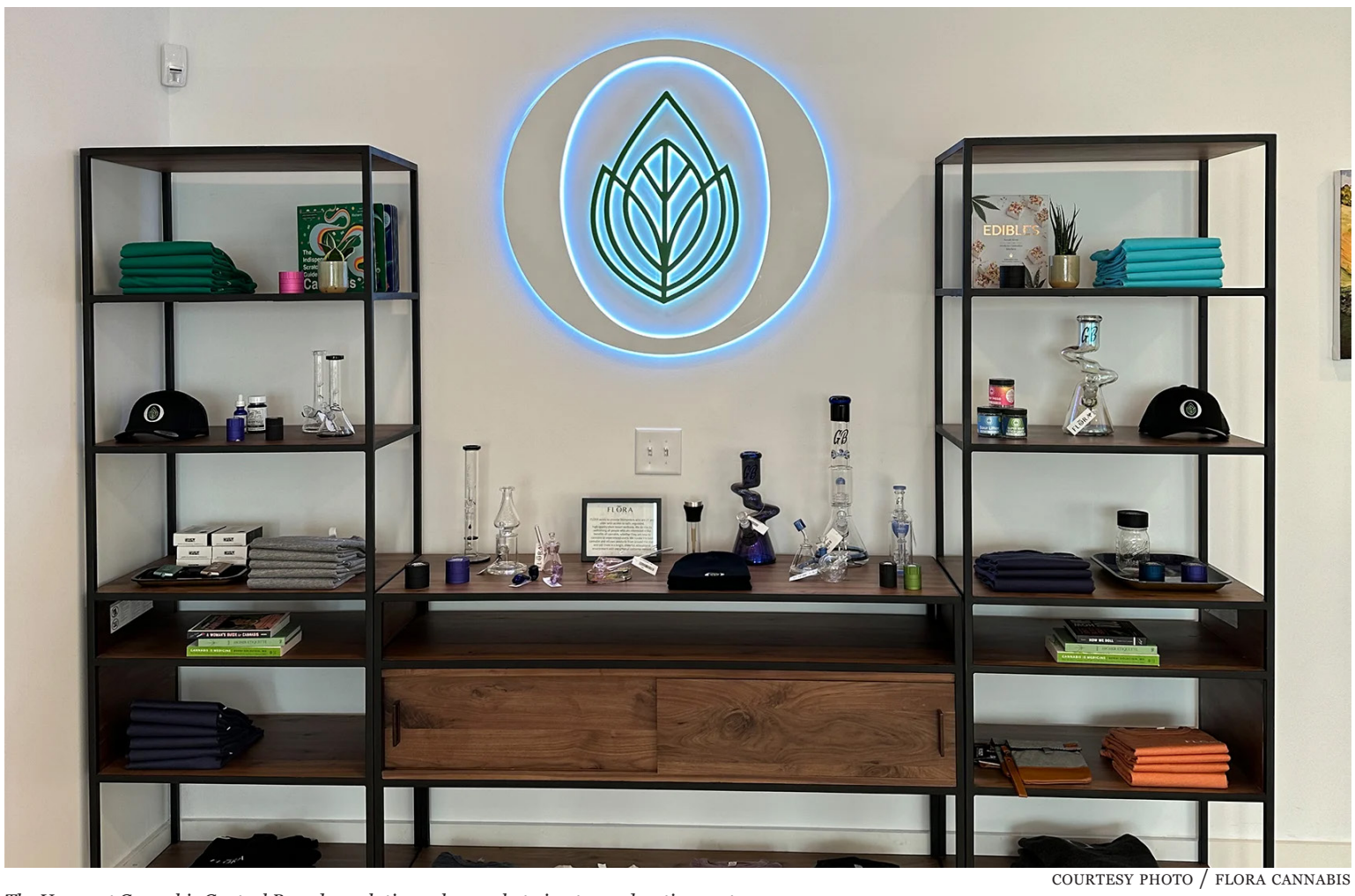
"I need a bigger space, and there are a few infrastructure things that I need like a big sink with water, which is why Toad Hall will be moving to the Marbleworks space," he said.

In addition to its floristry services, Toad Hall Flowers is hosting weekly Saturday workshops throughout January, inviting community members to learn how to create their own terrariums. This popular hands-on activity is something Cousineau plans to expand at the new Marbleworks location, which will have a dedicated section for customers to design their own house plants and terrariums.

Until Jan. 31, Toad Hall Flowers will remain in its current space on Main Street, open Thursdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

FLORA sues Vermont Cannabis Control Board over advertising regulations

Conntinued from Page 1



COURTESY PHOTO / FLORA CANNABIS

The Vermont Cannabis Control Board regulations also apply to in-store advertisements.

their proposed advertisements to the CCB, which must notify the business of their decision within 10 business days. The control board can deny, approve, or request additional information from the business. If the advertisement is denied, a business can revise it and resubmit for approval.

While the Chair of Cannabis Control Board James Pepper acknowledged that the law can be restrictive, he said that regulations are necessary for the safety of the community. Although wait time for approval on advertisements can impact a company financially, the CCB maintains that their reviews and frequent denials of advertisements are sparing the businesses administrative penalties down the line.

"I think that's that was the kind of calculus that the legislature was weighing, when it decided to have pre-approval, and that's just one aspect," Pepper said.

Dave Silberman, co-founder of FLŌRA, argued that these restrictions hinder cannabis business' ability to operate effectively and that the current guidelines are unsustainable. Their primary concern lies in how many forms of promotion qualify as advertisement.

The CCB received 29 advertising submissions in September from Vermont cannabis businesses and nine were denied, primarily because their health warnings were missing or unclear. The Board received 34 complaints that month, and five were advertising-related, according to a Jan. 15 report from the state board.

"Vermont's advertising law says that any statement, depiction, or illustration in any medium is considered an advertisement," Silberman said in an interview with The Campus. "The signs that I put up in my store are an advertisement — emails, social media posts, direct messages. So, it's extremely wide ranging, and a lot of restrictions apply."

According to Pepper, the Cannabis Control Board is not always capable of tracking every cannabis advertisement. Although regulations suggest that social media posts must be pre-approved, they are less easily monitored than physical advertisements and businesses often post about sales or discounts without approval.

"I think we have over 600 licensed businesses, and it's very challenging to keep track of everyone's social media," Pepper said. "We have very clear guidance around this, and so it's really a complaint driven on the social media side. Also, Facebook and some of the larger platforms are keeping an eye out for cannabis advertisements because they ban them as part of their policies. So there's an additional check there, but, really, it's just very hard to stay in front of."

Silberman, the FLŌRA co-founder, said that there are likely hundreds of social media posts daily from cannabis businesses that are never submitted for approval.

"Anytime somebody posts on social media without getting that prior approval they're exposing themselves to substantial fines," Silberman said. "And so everyone's taking a very big risk."

His business argued that the law directly harms local Vermont cannabis businesses, as customers unaware of their services may turn to national brands, online companies or dispensaries in nearby states to buy their products, which also impacts customers and their safety.

"Those people are not subject to any of the advertisement restrictions that I am. And so Vermont retailers like FLŌRA are losing customers to out-of-state and national brands," Silberman said. "And those consumers are losing out on the consumer safety aspects that Vermont's regulated market provides because we don't have any idea how those other products are tested and what is and is not allowed to go in them."

Additionally, under Vermont law, dispensaries cannot have more than one location. This makes advertising even more critical for cannabis businesses competing with national brands, according to Silberman.

"We operate like a small business, so we don't have full marketing teams or extensive planning. If we were to have these marketing teams we could plan in advance and accordingly to the approval timeline. But because of how dispensaries operate in Vermont, we cannot think that far in advance and we do not have entire teams to handle it," Silberman said.

The CCB's Jan. 15 report acknowledged these difficulties.

"Vermont-based businesses must comply with state advertising regulations, while competitors from neighboring states, advertising to the same regional audiences, do not. This disparity particularly affects retailers near state borders, who are unable to market as broadly as out-of-state operators located just a few miles away," the report read.

However, the report concluded that easing restrictions may improve the market for Vermont operators, it could also increase risks to public health and youth exposure to cannabis.

"Any changes to these laws will require careful consideration to balance the interests of industry growth with the state's commitment to public health and equity," the report said.

The lawsuit is ongoing, with the Assistant Attorney General of Vermont currently drafting a response to FLŌRA's complaint.

Editor's Note: Managing Editor Madeleine Kaptein '25.5 contributed reporting to this article.

J-TERM: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

Winter in Vermont is not for the faint of heart. J-Term at Middlebury represents a break from the usual academic schedule, yielding the freedom to try something new in academics or extracurriculars — but you may also find yourself cowering indoors from the cold with little to do.

In the free and adventurous spirit of J-Term, we decided to write about our favorite and least favorite parts of the shortest semester at Middlebury. Without further ado, here are some of the things we like and dislike about J-Term.

Our most obvious "like" of this semester is the snow that always seems to be accumulating just outside our doors. Walking outdoors at night with flurries falling all around on a silent campus is especially majestic, as is waking up in the morning to several fresh inches. Vermont blizzards and ample free time maximize our potential for snow sculptures — one Board member shared how he and a friend stayed up until 2 a.m. building a 100-yard snake with snowballs. It's classic for a reason, and we are always dreaming of a white J-Term.

One unanimous dislike was the limited light hours and seasonal blues that come knocking at everyone's door at some time during the darkness and cold of the winter months. We all know what it's like to feel sad for no particular reason except a 4 p.m. sunset, and in J-Term, especially when fewer demanding day-to-day tasks keep us occupied, this can be especially present.

Another aspect of J-Term we'd like to highlight is the freedom from the structure that accompanies a regular four-course schedule in the fall and spring. While having multiple courses can help spark new connections across disciplines and cover more material, the opportunity to spend one month dedicated to a specific class is invaluable. Language learners are often surprised by just how much their proficiency can grow in a short time, and many other students take advantage of visiting professors who teach subjects ranging from journalism to woodworking. Plus, the frequent and lengthy class blocks can lend themselves to forming a small community among your classmates and professor for the month.

While J-Term offers many students the opportunity to zero in on just one area of academia of professionalism, some find this situation unfavorable — as Middlebury students, we often treasure having a diverse array of coursework available to us, and if we end up in a class we don't enjoy as much as we did reading its description in the course catalog, it is easy to feel stuck. Not only this, but J-Term occupations vary significantly in commitment levels. Some of us are grinding to finish our theses, while others are learning to salsa, and this dissimilarity may leave us unable to relate to or share schedules with our friends.

SUSANNA SCHATZ

But no matter which course or internship you're enrolled in, J-Term is a month overflowing with possibilities to gain new skills or take up new hobbies. Some members of our board are participating in J-Term workshops, brief courses in J-Term taught by fellow students. Clicking the button on Ideal to register for these workshops is like joining a mad dash, and those with the quickest fingers are rewarded by learning to figure skate, hunt, interact with horses, mend clothing, and much more — not to mention the number of students each J-Term that finally take up ski lessons, either officially or casually from enthusiastic friends.

In no particular order, here are the honorable mentions for our J-Term preferences.

We like: Dolci breakfast, a grassroots resurgence in knitting, bundling up for the cold weather, getting lost in our unstructured days, sun lamps, hot chocolate (or any hot beverage) and Ian Baucom, our newest president.

We don't like: snowy flight delays, climate change, getting lost driving back to campus, skiing overtaking campus culture and the imminent risk of slipping on ice.

IDK about these IDs !

Op-Ed

Lucy Schembre is an *Opinions Editor and member of the class of 2026.5.*

Around 9 p.m. on Sunday night, as I traversed the windswept tundra forming between E Lot and the Chateau, I was devastated to realize that I had left my wallet — along with my one and only Middlebury ID card — inside my room. Clutching my cardboard box from the Grille to my chest in a fruitless attempt to preserve the heat of my meal, I berated myself for once again forgetting my "Key to the City." It was snowing, and the wind boldly declared it would not settle for a temperature in the double-digits.

I worried that Public Safety might not arrive promptly on a weekend night, and decided my only option would be to stick it out until a kind stranger granted me entrance into the building. Although Middlebury students, staff and faculty all deserve to feel and be safe from external threats while at the college, I have seriously begun to question the effectiveness and fairness of our ID-based system. While I believe a more substantial reconsideration of these security protocols is in order, we should at least consider dropping the $20 penalty for a lost ID to avoid financially punishing community members for simply being human.

I, and doubtlessly many others, believe that a good security system achieves a balance between providing individuals with protection against the highest possible number of dangerous situations and ensuring that security features are not such an impediment that the very individuals supposedly made "secure" by the system cannot reliably access their amenities, or circumvent the system altogether.

At Middlebury, each person receives an ID permitting them entry into certain dormitories, dining facilities, academic and professional spaces depending on their role on campus. For students, a lost ID incurs a $20 replacement penalty, as well as a wait of indeterminate length for an email from the college store indicating that the replacement is ready. In the meantime, students must contact Public Safety for a temporary ID. If a student's ID is not working as it is supposed to, they are instructed by Middlebury's "Student ID Cards" webpage to call dining services for assistance during their weekday hours (9 a.m-5 p.m).

I spoke with my friend, Violet Gordon '26.5, about the unnecessary toll of this replacement process, as she lost her ID last semester. She explained that while the fee may seem like "pocket change" to some students, that is not the case for many others. While Middlebury seeks to ensure that students can receive financial aid and other financial assistance — the Student Access and Support (SAS) grants, for instance —to take full advantage of the school's resources, there remains this seemingly arbitrary and potentially burdensome cost for replacing these required IDs.

Seeing as Middlebury recently raised $35 of the $50 million needed to finance the new museum replacing Battell, I highly doubt this fee is a necessary source of income for the school. But, you might say, the financial cost might make students more attentive to protecting their IDs. Unfortunately, no matter how careful we are with these little plastic cards, we will never be able to control every situation or remain singularly focused on something like an ID amidst academic, personal and other stressors inherent in the college experience.

When one loses their ID card or leaves it in a locked building, one is theoretically prevented from using dining, housing and academic services to which they are entitled. In most cases this is not literally true — students with lost IDs can have a friend use one of their three guest swipes per semester to let them into a dining hall, or wait, as I did, for a passerby to allow them entry into a building. But for new students adrift in a sea of unfamiliar faces, or those trapped outside in the cold and dark, the simple and predictable mistake of losing an ID can potentially be just as dangerous as leaving a door unlocked.

Of these solutions, the guest swipe is the only one that does not directly contradict the security system IDs are meant to enforce. Following ID theory, one should not allow an "unknown" person asking for entry into a locked building entry without proof of identity, such as an ID card. To do so defeats the purpose of the card-as-security-measure entirely. Yet, this is probably the quickest and easiest way to resolve lost ID difficulties temporarily, and is what saved me on Monday.

I think a credible explanation of proximate risk to the institution being secured must undergird this entire balancing act. I by no means intend to minimize the inherent risks of existing as a human being in a world rife with natural and constructed threats; I think we all remember the horrible stabbing attack which severely injured a student in town last year. I am not recommending that we throw away the IDs and leave every door unlocked. But, to this day I have yet to hear or read about any significant, consistent external threat to the safety of the Middlebury College students and employees coming from the town of Middlebury and its surrounding locales.

Though perhaps we can all agree that, even if only for the sake of appearances, Middlebury must maintain a high degree of security for its wards and workers, in practice the system seems to prevent the free movement of community members around campus and impose undue penalties upon us more than it consistently or verifiably prevents external threats from entering the indoor Middlebury community.

LUCY SCHEMBRE / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The scanners outside of many campus buildings require an ID to enter.

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SPECS PANTHER: SEX AND STRESS

Op-Ed

Liz Crawford is a member of the class of 2025 and a SPECS Peer-Educator.

SPECS Panther is a mascot for SPECS (sex positive education for college students) and serves the Middlebury community. As a part of Health & Wellness Education, SPECS Panther seeks to educate and spark independent dialogue, not be the end-all be-all resource on campus. We encourage Midd Kids to break down the walls of silence by engaging in sex-positive conversation — wherever, with whomever and about whatever is most comfortable, easy and safe for you. Our editions will be educational!

At some point in time you may have heard that sexual activity can be a de-stressor. For example, NBC News published a 2008 article titled "More sex, less stress," declaring to their audience that by having sex, they can reduce the undesirable buzzword of "stress." Sex is a natural stress-buster, but it is a misconception that by simply having more sex, your problems are magically solved. While it is partly true that physical intimacy and sexual intercourse can have positive effects on mental health and well-being, it is important to keep in mind that using sex as a de-stressor can work for some while not working for others. At SPECS, we advocate to Middlebury students that sexual activity, however one engages with it, is not a simple fix for stress, nor are the two mutually exclusive.

Sex affects stress, but stress also affects sex. Sex researchers have theorized the existence of a "Dual Control Model" operating in our brain. This model, which refers to the brake (sexual inhibitors) and the gas (sexual accelerators), controls both psychological and physiological responses to sexual stimuli. These two systems are simultaneously functioning, constantly scanning the surrounding environment for sexually relevant and non-sexually relevant stimuli. For instance, physical touch or the sound of your partner(s) voice can be arousing, but if you are in a large social setting, or perhaps with family, you would likely not be as turned on as you would be when alone or behind closed doors with your partner(s). The Dual Control Model also affects us on a subconscious level: Even if you were in your ideal physical setting to engage in sexual activity, your stressors might have inadvertent effects on your physiological responses. You might not be as 'in the mood' if you have a huge exam coming up the next day or if you just had a fight with a friend and it is on your mind.

Additionally, someone's physical arousal does not necessarily mean they are turned on and consent to sexual activity, just as the absence of someone's physical arousal does not equate to them being turned off and wanting to stop. This phenomenon is known as arousal non-concordance. It is therefore vital to prioritize communication and safety at all times, keeping in mind the consent model of FRIES (Freely given, Reversible, Informed, Enthusiastic and Specific). While you or your partner(s)'s body might not be responding to sexual stimuli based on external factors, it is important to listen to what they are saying, not their physical response or the lack thereof.

But what if you're not having sex? For example, asexuality and aromanticism are realities for some people. Physical, emotional and sexual intimacy may intersect for some while being completely differentiated — or nonexistent — for others.

While often the villain of many myths, masturbation can also be a pleasurable way to discover more of what you like while benefiting from some added stress-reducing side effects. Masturbation can release hormones like oxytocin, endorphins and dopamine that boost one's mood significantly and reduce cortisol. It is also the safest form of sex, as there is no risk of pregnancy and almost no risk of transmitting sexually transmitted infections (STIs). So even while not engaging in partnered sex, you are still able to experience the psychological benefits of sexual pleasure.

While your stress might inhibit your sexual drive, there are ways to seek out stress-reducing pleasure as discussed by Lou Forrester in "Sex When You're Sad: A Low-Energy Pleasure Toolkit." SPECS recommends reading this article if you want to learn more about the intersectionality of emotion and sex, and also contains messages that could be relevant in other parts of life.

There is no reason to believe that sex is the magical fix to solving any and all problems with stress. Connecting with anyone and using physical touch of any kind (if that's your jam) can ease stress. Especially as college students, there are more productive ways to cope with stress other than sex. Get outside, focus on friendships and reserve some time for yourself each day. Taking breaks and getting enough sleep are better for your productivity in the long run, anyway.

SPECS supports those wanting to destress in the ways that feel comfortable to them, and we want to remind all our readers that you are not summed up by a single category. You are not just your academic performance, the activities you do, your friendships, your sex life or your stress, but a sum of all of your unique parts. As college students, desires sometimes conflict with subconscious inhibitors such as stress, making it important to pause and readjust. Here at SPECS we encourage you to create a balance, especially when it comes to your sex life. Do not only use sex to medicate your stress, and try not to stress about not having sex. Our lives ebb and flow, and that is all part of the journey.

DONALD TRUMP HAS BEEN RE-ELECTED. WHAT NOW?

Op-Ed

Phoebe An is a member of the class of 2027.

Like many, I watched in stunned horror as Donald Trump crawled his way back into the highest office of our nation. I had hope in the American people: that they would not re-elect an impeached ex-president and convicted felon who had attempted to undermine our democratic process in a spectacle of populist-driven violence.

Yet, as the world held its breath, we witnessed the supposed leader of the free world continue on a spiraling path of democratic backsliding, with the American people affirming with a resounding electoral "yes".

Donald Trump's re-election is not just another four years. Between Trump's life-term appointments to the federal bench and the Supreme Court's decision on presidential immunity, Trump has an incredible window of opportunity to cement his power. His legacy will be a generation-defining moment, entailing a lifetime of consequences for our political system and the international community.

The problem didn't begin with Trump. While he poses a grave threat to our democracy and the future of millions of Americans, he is a logical conclusion of the contemporary American capitalistic tradition that enables policymakers funded by lobbyists to prioritize profit over citizens.

With 76% of the student population at Middlebury belonging to the top 20%, it is easy to feel untouchable. Despite what some students may believe, your blue home-state will not save your house from being burned down in uncontrollable wildfires that are exacerbated by America's addiction to greenhouse gases. Whiteness will not protect you from extreme abortion restrictions or budget cuts of already underfunded federal and state departments. Nor will affluence shield your children from the bullet of the firearm belonging to a mass shooter.

History has shown us that the seeds of authoritarianism begin small, planted without public outrage among those who are already unwanted by society. Eventually, these seeds will grow to strangle us all, regardless of our assumed privilege. By infantilizing ourselves into believing systematic change is impossible, we accept the status quo.

As a native Texan, I have watched my state be continually devastated by a myriad of disasters as policymakers ignore the pleas of their constituents while remaining at the beck and call of the highest bidder.

I was born into the chaos of my parents fleeing Hurricane Katrina in 2005, a disaster that claimed the lives of 1,833 people. Following category four Hurricane Harvey, I helped clear the remains of the ruined houses of my neighbors. I watched as 17 Uvalde elementary students and two teachers were gunned down while our elected officials continued to take money from the National Rifle Association and gun rights groups, proclaiming, "It could have been worse." I listened to how families burned alive in their homes when our electric grid failed during the Texas freeze while our senator fled to a luxury resort in Cancun. I have seen Texan women forced to fight in court while the maternal mortality rate dramatically increased by 56%. As a journalist, I have covered the criminalization of homelessness, where the City of Houston extensively fined and engaged in legal battles against volunteers feeding unhoused people.

These disasters are the results of special interest lobbying in both political parties, a phenomenon that predates the rise of Donald Trump. Despite various majority agreements on legislation — such as the American consensus for gun control — special interest groups now enhance the impact of the elites on legislation behind closed doors, threatening the power of the people.

PHOEBE AN / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

An recently traveled to Boston for a pro-Palestinian protest.

In the U.S, reality is dictated by who has money. In 2016, 158 families, with the companies they owned or controlled, donated half of early money in the presidential campaign, accounting for $176 million. In the first half of 2024, the oil and gas industry spent $72 million on federal lobbying following the EPA's implementation of regulation aimed to reduce fossil fuel emissions. Former President Joe Biden's farewell address to the nation warned us of an oligarchy forming and controlling our national legislation — this was an admission of guilt. The oligarchy is here and thriving through a wealthy elite that can compel our elected officials through financial motivation.

According to our government, social safety nets such as house or healthcare insurance are too expensive; Israel requires $12.5 billion in direct military aid since 2023 despite its ongoing genocide; and countries such as Vietnam, Laos, Korea, the Philippines, Afghanistan and Iraq must be invaded for self-serving ideological and monetary goals. Rather than use our tax dollars to innovatively solve our society's greatest problems, the U.S. government — regardless of political party — leverages them to fuel the decimation of innocents abroad, nauseatingly enriching those who gain monetarily from war and conflict.

With our political system resting on just two parties founded on inequality, how are we as individuals to change the genetic code of a nation?

This is not a call to despair, but rather a signal to be intentional in examining politics beyond face-value. Don't rely on The New York Times or your first-year political science course to critically examine the world for you. Their value is only as extensive as your ability to look deeper than which facts are presented. Contextualization is your greatest weapon in freeing yourself from the illusions of what others want you to see.

A pillar in the foundation of our resistance to the state is understanding and sharing information in a setting that encourages critical thinking. The state's abysmal leadership is reliant on our division and our submission to the government's will. Learning and the pains that come with it are tools of resistance that have historically been in the line of fire within oppressive regimes.

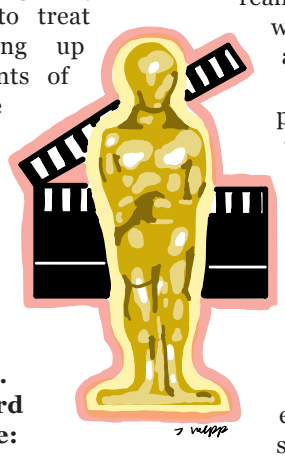
Authoritarian systems feed on our despair. The greatest indoctrination into complacency is the belief that as citizens of the most powerful nation on Earth, we hold no power. Our generation is addicted to cynicism, and we have earned every right to be. Previous generations have failed us considerably in every metric. But to endure and fight for radical change must mean surrendering ourselves to hope.

CATHERINE'S CHOICE AWARDS

By Catherine Goodrich
Seniors Arts & Culture Editor

For me, the only redeemable quality of winter is awards season. From now until Daylight Savings, the cold days in my calendar are benchmarked with The Golden Globes, Grammys and Oscars. It's pretentious, absolutely, but I love how these ceremonies celebrate talented artistry — as subjective as trying to judge it might be.

In the spirit of unearned authority, I'm offering my personal flavor of pomp and circumstance before Feb graduation. For my last article, in the middle of this gloomy month, I wanted to treat myself to rounding up my favorite moments of arts and culture at Middlebury to share with you. Without further ado, it is my pleasure to present the Catherine's Choice Awards.



The 12 a.m. WRMC Award for Excellence: ProcHampton

I made one of my first friends in college because she was wearing a BROCKHAMPTON hoodie. I thought she was the coolest person in the line at Proctor (and I was probably right) and we hit it off over a love for The Hardest Working Boyband in Show Business. I think a lot of friends harbor the delusion that their conversations would make for a good podcast, and I'm so grateful to WRMC for entertaining that fantasy for me and Mia Gaiever '24. Our show, ProcHampton, was nothing if not reliant on the FCC's safe harbor. ProcHampton's first time slot was from 1 a.m. to 2 a.m. (we showed up half the time), next semester we were promoted to the 12 a.m. shift (we attended two-thirds of these), and finally, by senior year we were on air Wednesday nights from 11 p.m. to midnight. Having a standing appointment with one of my nearest and dearest Middlebury friends was a privilege I don't take lightly, and one of the things I'll miss the most about college. Moreover, there is a Schrodinger's effect having a radio show during the witching hours allows; you have no idea if there's a soul tuning into your conversation and this not-knowing makes the experience infinitely more fun.

The Laurie Patton Award for Most-Anticipated Day of the Year: Nocturne

One of the greatest champions of Nocturne, President Emerita Laurie Patton said of the festival in her final interview with The Campus, "If we want to have really faithful arguments with more wisdom and deeper respect, the arts is a very powerful way to do that. And the people who've told us that and taught us that are our students, and they continue to be students."

I couldn't agree more. Nocturne, the free (anti-profit, even) showcase of student art is the most creative, collaborative and carefree night of the academic year. It's the perfect transition from mud season to spring where students construct a tiny, resourceful metropolis for the night. This past year, my friend Emma Cortina '24.5 and I drew improvised portraits of festival goers that they could take with them. Even for untrained, makeshift artists like Cortina and me, Nocturne is the perfect forum for DIY fun.

Spirit Award for Indie Enterprising Prestige: The Hepburn Zoo

I was awe-struck my first time in the Hepburn Zoo watching "Botticelli In The Fire". It's the only space on campus that's as magical as the shows it houses. The scale of the Zoo amazes me; it can have the vitality of a grand cityscape or the familiarity of an intimate living room on a dime. When I saw "Botticelli In The Fire," a show as bold as it is tender, I was taken aback by just how much of a punch a black box theater and a good cast and crew can pack. I got better acquainted with the space as a board-op for a Middlebury Discount Comedy show and "Airswimming" and became more enchanted with the bootstrapping spirit of Zoo productions. I'm embarrassed by how earnest this reverence is, but it's nothing short of amazing to see your friends, that guy from class, that girl from the line at Ross, on stage suspending disbelief so confidently. The time and care it takes to put on a student-run show is admirable and the result can be utterly remarkable.

MCAB Award for Circular Narrative Satisfaction: Flo Milli and Flo Rida

As a 22-year-old native Alabamian, the opening lyrics of "In The Party" mean more to me than "Sweet Home Alabama" ever will. I was over the moon when MCAB x WRMC announced Flo Milli would be performing at Middlebury's 2021 fall concert — the first since COVID. It was a triumphant return for the Middlebury arts scene, to say the least. Flo Milli rocked the Battell lawn with a slice of Southern excellence that wouldn't be matched until the spring of 2024 when Flo Rida gave rural Vermont a run for its money. I had just submitted my thesis (a paper on contemporary literature in Florida) when the concert was announced. I hate to be so self-righteous as to say the MCAB concert lineup from 2020–2024 was meant for me, but it's the closest thing to a picture-perfect book ending to my college experience I could ask for.

Proc Crush List Award for My Longest Relationship: The Middlebury Marquis

Around this time three years ago, I started working at The Marquis. I was hoping a job off-campus would vary dark winter days and help me feel a little more connected to Middlebury. I got what I wished for ten times over. The Marquis was my first service job and I loved how real and concrete the work was. Being on the public-facing end of an art form I love so much, a form that often feels intangible and out of reach, was a way to connect with the best parts of the medium. Talking to customers, shelling out popcorn and candy and sweeping out said popcorn and candy from under the theater's beloved leather couches were small ways of showing my appreciation for cinema and the audiences that connect with it. By far the best part of this job is the people who work there — some of the warmest, funniest people in Middlebury. As corny (pun intended) as it sounds, The Marquis taught me that as much as I love movies, I love the people who love movies more.

CATHERINE GOODRICH / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Catherine spent Nocturne drawing ameteur portraits of passersby.

Honorable mentions: The big tray of salad at Atwater, Hirschfield screenings, "Survivor" winner Sophie Clarke '11 and The Special Collections Instagram.

The formidable New York writer, Dorothy Parker once said of her hometown, "New York is always hopeful. Always it believes that something particularly good is about to come off, and it must hurry to meet it."

I think it's Vermont's earnestness combined with college-aged verve that makes Middlebury much the same way. There's always something here worth paying attention to, always a performance, an exhibit, an artist with something interesting to show. As far as I'm concerned, Wright Theater is Broadway, the Axinn Winter Garden is Washington Square Park, Johnson is Chelsea and The Knoll is Brooklyn. Pretend it's a city — you'll never be bored.

REEL CRITIC: "WALLACE & GROMIT: VENGEANCE MOST FOWL"

By VIRGINIA FRAU
Arts & Culture Editor

With the release of "Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl" onto Netflix this month, audiences saw both the return of the beloved Lancastrian duo after 17 years as well as the series' most iconic antagonist, the penguin Feathers McGraw — criminal genius and master of disguise.

At the start of the film, the audience is introduced to Wallace's latest invention: Norbot the Nifty Odd-Jobbing Robot, a robotic garden gnome powered by artificial intelligence (AI). He is designed to carry out gardening tasks like hedge-trimming, mowing and "pointlessly blowing leaves around" with frightening zeal. Norbot is actually meant as a gift for Gromit, who takes a visible satisfaction in completing all these "tedious" chores with care. But when Norbot is let loose on Gromit's garden with the instructions of making it "neat and tidy," he shears every flower bed bare, fervently mows the grass down to nubs and reduces every hedge to severe geometric motifs. Already, the audience spots the danger in this newest gadget, a danger that Wallace is invariably oblivious to.

However, the stakes are heightened when Feathers McGraw, imprisoned in the local Zoo since his infamous diamond heist, manages to change Norbot's settings from GOOD to EVIL by hacking (with remarkable ease) into Wallace's files from a zookeeper's computer. He programs the gnome to begin mass production on more Evil-Norbots and eventually, break him out of his exhibit so that he can enact his vengeance on the man and dog who put him behind bars all those years ago.

The film makes several overt criticisms on the use of AI and capitalist society's over-reliance on technology. This shouldn't come as a shock to longtime Wallace & Gromit fans who, over the years, have watched the pair battle with a less-than-friendly robot living on the surface of the moon, a pair of self-walking trousers rewired by a certain malicious penguin and a malfunctioning, murderous, sheep-rustling cybo-dog. But many viewers were surprised and impressed by what Letterboxd reviewer PJ called "[the] most nuanced AI commentary of the decade."

Wallace's superfluous use of technology for mundane everyday tasks has been a long-running gag in the franchise, with his inventorial approach often being compared to 'using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.' Several of the series's films (including "Vengeance Most Fowl") feature a montage of Wallace getting ready — or rather, being readied — in the morning by an elaborate sequence of automated machinery. But in this installment, Wallace's inventing takes on new heights of irony: Wallace goes so far as to outsource his own affection for Gromit when he makes him the Pat-o-Matic, a machine to give his canine friend 'pats' of customizable intensity. The concept of the so-called "labour of love" is clearly lost on Wallace who thinks he is saving Gromit from the 'ages' he spends 'toiling away' in his treasured garden by gifting him the nightmarish Norbot.

Wallace's gross overuse of technology is contrasted by the very medium of the film. Stop motion animation is by nature a slow, highly manual technique. One second of filming consists of an average of 25 individually posed frames, which can be accomplished at a rate of around 30 frames per animator per day. The team that produces the franchise, Aardman Features, has been resistant to the use of computer animation in their films. Aside from a six-year partnership with DreamWorks Animation which saw the creation of "Chicken Run" (2000), "Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit" (2005), and "Flushed Away" (2006) (the only film of the three to be majorly produced using computer animation), the franchise has exclusively utilized stop motion. It's an artistic practice that routinely pays off, as evidenced at the very least by the franchise's charming mise-en-scène (in "Vengeance Most Fowl", Gromit can be seen reading, variously, "Paradise Lost" by John 'Stilton' and "A Room of One's Own" by Virginia 'Woof').

The film also points to the unethical exploitation of labor that fuels AI engines by upholding the rage-baiting dynamic between its two protagonists. Gromit historically supports Wallace as his emotional and physical caretaker, often enabling him past the comical limits of codependency and "Vengeance Most Fowl" is no exception. Gromit waits on Wallace, operating his 'self-readying' machinery and aiding in his inventing, often without thanks or acknowledgment. Instead, Gromit is written off as a "daft pooch" when he justly mistrusts the army of gnomes militarizing in their basement. And when Wallace is investigated in connection to a series of garden-related robberies in the area and the delightfully (to some) incompetent 'coppers' confiscate every last one of his inventions, it is Gromit who sets out to uncover McGraw's plot and clear Wallace's name.

COURTESY PHOTO / WALLACE & GROMIT

In only the first 30 minutes, the gnomes' behavior escalates from unintentionally destructive to strategically violent, going so far as to trap Gromit in a tool shed before sneaking off with a van-full of stolen garden supplies. But the tension established in the early part of the film suffers over the next hour as the plot drags between chatty exposition and thoroughly wrung-out chase scenes. The tightest sequences are those achieved entirely non-verbally, like Gromit's and McGraw's face-off in the canal tunnel (a reference, among many in the film, to Tom Cruise's heroics in "Mission: Impossible"). Gromit and McGraw are old foes and classic character foils who, with their steady wits, mute sardonicism and love for classical music, are well-suited to each other in conflicts that fly miles above Wallace's comprehension. Disappointingly, "Vengeance Most Fowl" seems to underrate the dog-penguin pair almost as much as Wallace routinely underestimates the two of them individually.

What the film's overwrought final act does offer (but perhaps fails to execute) is a resolution to the imbalance in Wallace and Gromit's relationship. It takes Gromit literally hanging on the precipice of life and death for Wallace to admit, "I can live without inventing, but I can't live without ...(gulp; tears)... me best pal."

In the film's final scene, Wallace serves Gromit tea in his garden, which has been restored to its wild beauty, and personally grants him a loving pat on the head.

While certainly clever but hardly impressively 'nuanced', "Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl" takes on the rise of AI in the everyday while resolving one of the most fraught audience-film tensions in history. Even if it could afford to lose some 30-40 minutes, it is a charmingly animated and classically punny ride for all eighty.

WRMC RADIO ROUNDUP

By WRMC EXEC BOARD
Contributing Writers

General Manager's pick: Georgia Perlah '25

Album title: "Whatever" by Aimee Mann (1993)

Genre: Indie Rock, Alternative, New Wave

RIYL: Til Tuesday, Neko Case, Belle and Sebastian, Sharon Van Etten

I probably have an Aimee Mann phase like once a season, but this winter it has come around in full force. "Whatever" is Mann's debut album, released in 1993. It was Mann's first solo album following the dissolution of Til Tuesday, famous for the hit single "Voices Carry." Mann's prolific songwriting talent is on full display in this grungy, experimental, guitar-driven collection. I listened to "Whatever" for the first time this fall and instantly fell in love with Mann's early, more raw sound.

Tech Director's pick: Idanesi Ojior '27

Album: "Milk and Kisses" by Cocteau Twins

Genre: Dream Pop, Ambient, Alternative Rock

RIYL: The Sundays, early Slowdive, Lush

Cocteau Twins' final studio album "Milk & Kisses" is an ambient cosmic wall of sound, accompanied by lyrics of pure gibberish and uncommonly, actual words from lead singer Elizabeth Fraser. Almost everything in this album can be tied to one of their earlier works and I find that this may be the band's ultimate album (not their best album, for that I nominate "Four-Calendar Cafe") as it best represents their sound! "Rilkean Heart" an ode to Jeff Buckley and my favorite track from the album is a glowing song that I'm always compelled to sing and hum alongside, even if I can't hear the lyrics completely. This album is fitting for any mood, it will always put you in a state of awe, can uplift you on a sad day, or keep you down if that's what you're looking for. I say it is best listened to alone, on a foggy, rainy, or snowy day. Just vibes all around.

Social Media Manager's pick - Margaux Joly '27
Album: "La symphonie des éclairs" by Zaho de Sagazan

Genre: Synth, Pop, Electronic
RIYL: David Bowie, synthesizers, Stromae, new wave, LCD Soundsystem

Zaho de Sagazan's hauntingly beautiful husky voice fits perfectly in her songs whether they be heavily backed with synth sounds or a simple piano ballad. The album covers Zaho's ability to fall in love and become obsessed with men she's never met and her addiction to cigarettes. Only her first album, at 25 years old, it packs a punch and leaves you wanting more.

Concert Manager's Pick: Tasha Deen '25

Album: "Beats and Breaks from the Flower Patch" by Kitty Craft

Genre: Alternative, Indie, Dream-Pop

RIYL: 800 Cherries, Rocketship, Helvetia, Starflyer 59

Kitty Craft is the synth-pop, dream-like, multi-sample creation of Minnesotan native Pamela Valfer. The album, "Beats and Breaks from the Flower Patch," was initially released in the late 90s and I've never been able to let the album go too far from my repeats. The album offers a flowery and lightheaded feeling; it is the quintessential sound for laying on your belly, facing all your friends with your feet up in the air, and the sounds of soft giggles filling the room.

Programming Manager's Pick: Grace Augspurger '25

EP: Nom Nom Nom / Cat Burglar by Hot Chip and Sleaford Mods

Genre: Post-punk

RIYL: Amyl and the Sniffers, Skepta, Viagra Boys

One of my favorite contemporary bands, Sleaford Mods (an Irish punk/rap duo who recently won a lawsuit against the British government) just released these two singles with London electronic band Hot Chip. The collaboration combines Sleaford Mods explicit and politically charged lyrics with Hot Chip's more synthy sound.

"Mountainfilm" brings inspiration to Middlebury

By RUBY SALISBURY
Contributing Writer

Members of the Middlebury community gathered in Dana Auditorium on Jan. 14 to experience a collection of short films that transported them across the world and into the lives of a wide range of remarkable storytellers. This year the films featured stories from outdoor landscapes everywhere from Mexico, California, Sweden, Japan, Zambia and beyond.

Mountainfilm is a film festival started in 1979 that now has a tradition of being hosted by the Middlebury Mountain Club, bringing together students, staff and community members for a showcase of immersive and unique documentaries. As the name suggests, Mountainfilm features beautiful scenes of mountains and other outdoor spaces, but the films' themes often go much farther beyond the surface of their settings. The Mountainfilm mission statement highlights the far-reaching intentions of the film festival.

"Fusing the power of film, art, and ideas, Mountainfilm inspires audiences to create a better world," the statement reads.

Projects such as Mountainfilm are valuable in their ability to highlight non-mainstream stories and the importance of making the outdoors accessible to a wider group of people. One of the films from the festival, "Leaving a Tread," focused on mountain biker Israel Carrillo and his mission of increasing access to the sport in Guanajuato, Mexico. The film "Re" showcased the story of one of the first women ski photographers in the world and her dedication to promoting female athletes. One of the longest films from the festival, "The Last Observers," told the charmingstory of a Swedish couple who have dedicated their lives to each other and the weather station where they live.

Mountainfilm displays diverse perspectives on the outdoors that are not always at the forefront of Middlebury's thriving outdoors scene. Former MMC president Will Hinkle '26 was one of the primary coordinators of this year's production of Mountainfilm and spoke about the value of the festival as a way to showcase diverse perspectives in outdoor recreation.

"Getting to bring all of these people together to watch Mountainfilm reminds us all that there is no one definition of what it means to be outdoors, which I think is especially important at a place like Middlebury," Hinkle said in an interview with The Campus.

Some of the films featured at Mountainfilm this year spoke to audiences because of their meaningful environmental storytelling. One film, "Ghost Resorts: Japan" took viewers on a journey back in time, showing the incredible beauty of an abandoned ski resort. Next, "Above the Noise" dramatically featured skydiver Maja Kuczynska in her element as she soared above the world.

Middlebury students watching the festival described the films as inspiring and majestic. One student said that watching Mountainfilm made her feel more excited about life.

Another essential theme to many of the films this year was the sense of community outdoor spaces foster. The film "Ascend" told the story of a group of women forced to flee their homes in Afghanistan finding empowerment and family from rock climbing together in Yellowstone. "Near the River" explored the lives of locals in the town of Livingston, Zambia working together as white water kayaking guides. One of the most impactful films from the festival, "Dancing Warrior," was filmed on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and showed how native youth in the area found purpose in their horse racing team. All of the diverse communities featured in these films engage meaningfully with the outdoors, connecting with one another in unique and moving ways.

Here at Middlebury, the outdoors has a huge impact on the community many students have formed during their time in college. Groups such as Fostering Inclusive Recreation Experiences (FIRE) and MMC are examples of student organizations that focus on fostering access to outdoor recreation.

"These films have a really unique way of showing that there are a wide range of ways to engage with the outdoors, and a lot of meaning that can come from that," Hinkle explained.

Choral Chameleon unearths new discoveries in unique concert

By LILY JENSEN
Contributing Writer

The Choral Chameleon performed a stunning, cohesive musical experience: "CONTROL: A Musical Journey within the Generation Gap" in Robison Hall on Saturday, Jan 18.

Any claim that the choral art form is one of the past was proven wrong in this performance. The Choral Chameleon displayed that choir can be a medium for reimagining the future and can be revitalized in a modern context.

The program combined a variety of genres and eras of music: "New arrangements of R&B/Pop tunes, Renaissance, Broadway, 20th Century Choral, Classical, and more," Choral Chameleon chorister Drew Young said in an interview with The Campus. But these songs did not stand alone — together they took part in a conversation, telling a story.

"This program spans seemingly unconnected genres but with a clear throughline," performer Christina Swanson said. This throughline was the soul of the performance exploring the complex, tumultuous and rewarding relationships between parents and children, considering how much power can be found in cross-generational understanding.

The concert's themes stood out as a cohesive and meaningful expression of musicality and humanity. These connections were made evident through the emphasis on the text of the selections. Not only did Vince Peterson, director of the Choral Chameleon, recite and quote text from many pieces, but every text in full was included in the program for the audience to follow along with. Peterson also drew a connected narrative in his brief, lively and charming short speeches between sections of the concert.

While Peterson was guiding the audience through the musical journey, the singers themselves did a lot of the storytelling. From their voices to their facial expressions, they captured the bittersweet nature of these concepts and relationships. The ensemble was frequently swaying or engaging their body in some way through vocal or instrumental percussion. The arrangements involved several moments of overlapping and call/response which emphasized the dialogue. The singing itself was complex and beautiful with soaring soloists and beautifully blended harmonies, making for a sound both gentle and intense.

"Their musicianship is creative and thoughtful and they sang as one sound," said concert attendee Mary Claire Dehaven.

Even though the singers have a lot of power in the artistry presented, another type of artistry and intention goes into the creation of the program.

"We want our concerts to be a mirror that we hold up to our audience…that provokes and invokes discernment," Peterson said.

On a college campus, a home to students at a time of life in which the struggles of freedom and control between parents and children are particularly amplified, Peterson thought that this was the a that needed to be told.

Robison Hall seemed to be a microcosm for the very questions about generational differences and continuities the concert was asking. The audience was mostly comprised of an older population, with college students sprinkled throughout, while the stage was dominated by middle-aged adults. Each of these generations and each individual people have different experiences of age, life, relationships and freedom.

"[These themes are] applicable to everyone no matter what stage of life they're in," said choir member and Middlebury alum Annie Beliveau '18.

"It's such a good theme because parents and kids are having a hard time understanding each other's experience of gender," added Dehaven during intermission.

Many of our issues in the U.S today, gender among them, involve elements of misunderstanding across generations. But misunderstanding, rebellion and tension between generations is nothing new. In the program note, Peterson connected the ways that rock and roll and hip-hop created controversy among parents.

"When children forge their own paths — paths that diverge from parental dreams — tensions can rise, leaving both sides feeling misunderstood," Peterson wrote.

The Choral Chameleon is unlike a traditional choir in many ways. Their 16-person ensemble, hands-off conducting approach, electronic iPads and audience participation with choral settings of classic Bob Dylan, Janet Jackson and the Beatles brought this unconventional performance to life. The arrangements had similar quirks encouraging the audience to think differently. For example, hearing a song like "Control" by Janet Jackson or "The Times They Are A-Changin" by Bob Dylan in a choral arrangement gives the song a new and unexpected flair.

"The Choral Chameleon is a rare organization…one that values the singer as a professional musician, and works to expand the overall vision and perception of choral music," Allison Coyne Carrol Performing Arts Series Director wrote in an email to The Campus.

The Choral Chameleon does not stay within the realm of what choral music is supposed to be. In line with this mission, the ensemble presented an out-of-the-box choral music installation on Wednesday evening in tandem with other local choirs called "I AM."

Another unique element was the closing song, "Better People," which while may be a little too on the nose, was still charming in driving the main point home. Together everyone in the room sang the chorus in unison: "If young people would talk to old people it would make us a better people all around." This phrase took on other variations throughout the song, referencing current political and racial divides. It seemed as if the cross-generational singing and connection in the auditorium was a manifestation of exactly the point the song and program was trying to make.

The Choral Chameleon put on a show in true chameleon fashion, camouflaging and reflecting the questions of independence and freedom that young adults continue to ask on Middlebury's campus and the possibility and hope that can be found in relationships and dialogues across the generational divide.

COURTESY PHOTO / CHORAL CHAMELEON
Choral Chamleon performed "CONTROL: A Musical Journey within the Generation Gap" last week.

MARCO MOTRONI '25 CONJURES UP A MAGICAL EVENING AT WILSON HALL

By GREGORY MARCINIK
Contributing Writer

COURTESY PHOTO / PRANA FILM

Marco Motroni '25 performed a number of tricks for a captivated audience, despite a few technical mishaps.

Middlebury can bring some unexpected, even magical, surprises.

This J-Term, the campus was witness to the premiere of Marco Motroni '25's Magic Show. Motroni, a Long Island native who has been practicing magic since the early age of three, has been a part of Middlebury's track & field team, football team, orchestra and other groups on campus — and has now put on his very own magic show.

"When I think again of the inspiration this show can have, it's really about seeing the resources Middlebury can offer. I came in there with an idea, and they could see how excited I was about it, and they really worked with me," Matroni told The Campus.

Even half an hour before the show began, Wilson Hall was packed to the gills. The Grille was sponsoring the show, and everyone wanted the best seats and treats they could get in the house. A long line formed from the front entrance spanning to the back doors of McCullough Student Center. As everyone vied for a good seat, Motroni, accompanied by big band music that played over the speakers, walked around the crowded room, greeting the guests.

By 5:30 p.m., the hall was crowded with students anxiously waiting for the show to start. Shortly after, the doors closed, and unlucky students who had come too late to snag a seat looked on through the windows.

Then, at exactly 5:43 p.m., Motroni appeared from behind the stage with a white light shining upon him, wearing a grey sweater and black suit.

He then explained that he wanted the show to be about memories of Middlebury, revealing a bowl filled with index cards that members of the crowd had written their memories on. Some cards were yellow, labeled with the names of certain drinks that students remembered. Motroni then asked a volunteer to pick a random card, which he then gave to a football player without showing the magician. Motroni then magically revealed that the drink on the card was a Corona Extra, and he pulled one from his coat pocket, along with a bottle opener, before giving it to the football player to drink.

For Motroni, the show was not just about magic but also the importance of memory.

"A huge part of what I want the audience to lean into, especially in the half to three-quarters range of the show, is the memories we made at Middlebury," he said.

The crowd gave a round of applause. For his next trick, Motroni pulled out a deck of cards and walked into the audience. He gave one of the students a card without seeing it and then put it inside the deck. The crowd waited in anticipation as he suddenly burned through the rest of the deck with pyrotechnics with the fire stopping at the card the student picked.

Motroni then brought a friend from the track team on stage and showed him shapes on an index card. He told him to remember them as best he could but warned his magic would make him forget one of the shapes. The magician showed the card to the audience, who learned the shapes, while he tried to make his volunteer forget the shapes on the cards. The music in the hall became mystical, until Motroni revealed that the student had forgotten that a heart was one of the shapes on the card. Slightly embarrassed, the track athlete (half-jokingly) ran out of the hall.

Despite a few technical mishaps throughout his act, Motroni played off the show's snafus with charisma and tact. And even with a large crowd, the show was not at all rigid.

"It was an idea three months in the making," Motroni explained.

In his next few tricks, he guessed the thoughts of other students and drew the same pictures that they were simultaneously drawing, all while explaining the importance of memories at Middlebury. He then brought two friends on stage and gave them each a card from a deck. After they chose their cards, he ripped them apart, before 'magically' fusing the halves together so that each could have a card to remind them of this moment.

For his final trick, Motroni asked another friend to come on stage. He gave him a picture and told him to draw what he saw, but the student spelled out the image. Motroni then asked him to pick a random card, which was a nine of hearts, before he revealed that the image the student saw was a blue monkey. He then revealed a poster on the side of the stage, which was previously hidden, of a blue monkey holding a nine-of-hearts. The crowd erupted into applause, which only became louder once Motroni took off his sweater to reveal his T-shirt was also of the blue monkey holding the nine-of-hearts. In a masterful bait and switch, his last big reveal was that he was giving away free T-shirts of the monkey holding the nine-of-hearts.

Looking back at his legacy, and considering that many in the crowd were also seniors, Motroni said he wanted them to leave with something they would never forget.

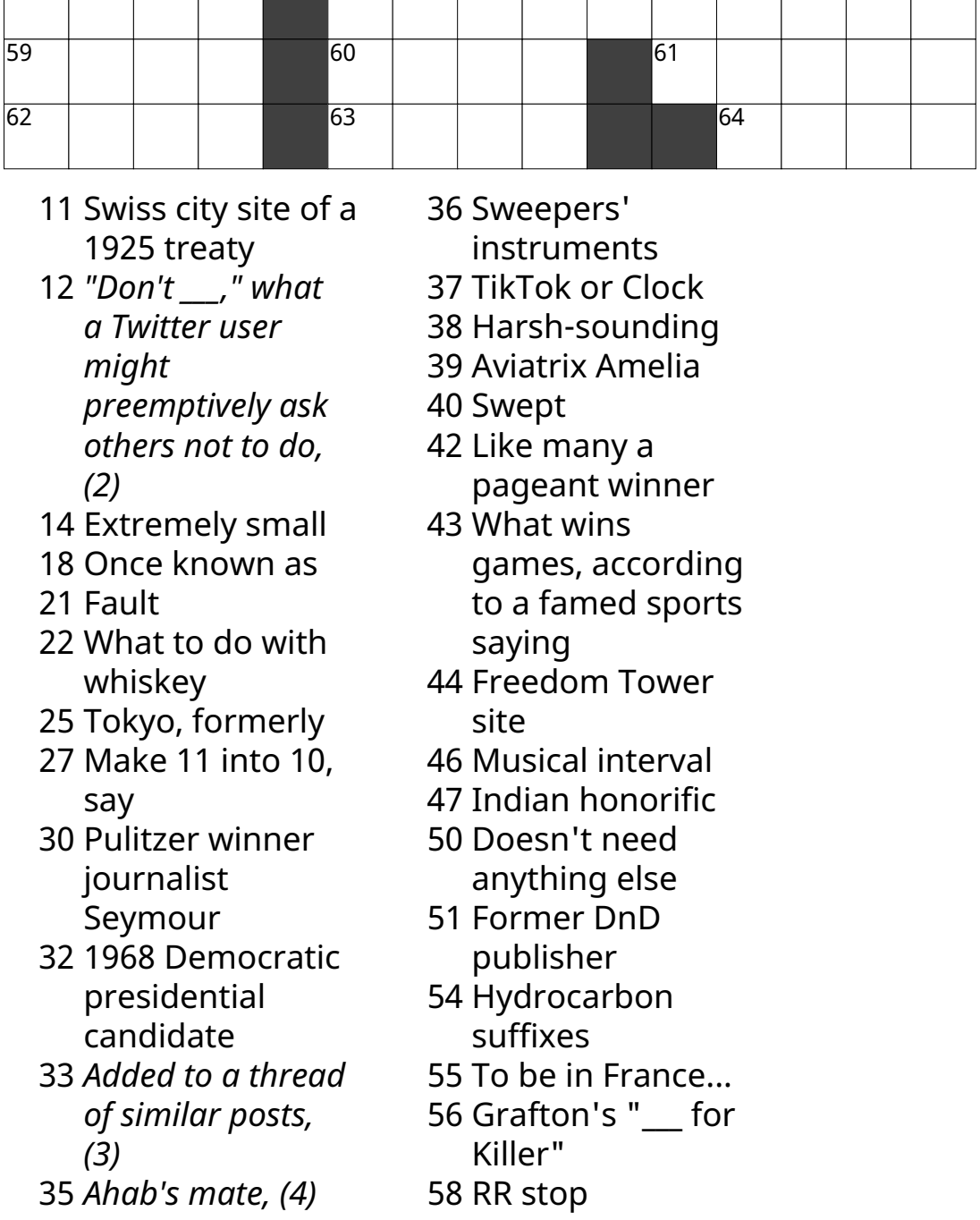
"We're graduating soon, and I'm not ready to graduate, and I've really enjoyed my time here, and looking back on memories is something I wanted to make part of the show," he added.

The performance was a labor of love that had a Do-It-Yourself flair, according to Matroni.

"The main message is that this can be you, if you have an idea and want to put something on, you can actually put on a show."

Keyboard Clutter Final

Joshua Harkins



ACROSS

1 Mend, as a sock
5 Soak up the sun
9 *Minor key used in Beethoven's Funeral March, (2)*
13 Bad time for a fire alarm
15 Response to troubling information, perhaps
16 Latch (onto)
17 Sheriff of ___, Robin Hood's nemesis
19 Staple crop across the world
20 *Milan fashion house, (7)*
22 Leb. and Isr. neighbor
23 Result of a hung jury
24 M.A. applicant's test
26 Opening
28 ___ Lingus, Ireland's national carrier
29 Lend ___, give some help to
31 Filipino currency
32 "R u Srs rn?"
33 *Movement championed by the Silence Breakers, (3)*
34 Defunct gridiron league, abbr.
36 Bambi, for one
37 Tommy Lee Jones' character in Men in Black
40 Start of a flower
41 Put away
45 Milan fashion house
46 Surgery spots, for short
47 Important key when deciphering the themed clues
48 The Masters' is 288
49 Cheese used in Lasagna
52 Where one can find the Steelers and Chiefs
53 *Famous sign on Harry Truman's desk, (4)*
56 Given name meaning "ancient" in Irish that can also begin with a C
57 Do-gooders
59 Memo starter
60 Balanced
61 French port
62 Army NCOs
63 Lasso and Mosby for two on television
64 Where the original sin took place

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2 Pain reliever
3 Comebacks
4 Part of NASA, abbr.
5 *Where one might purchase clothes if, (7)*
6 Silvery hair colour
7 What a fresh breeze by the beach might consist of
8 Former NBA all-star Walker who also excelled at UConn
9 Taj Mahal spot
10 Throw toward, with gusto
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12 *"Don't ___," what a Twitter user might preemptively ask others not to do, (2)*
14 Extremely small
18 Once known as
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25 Tokyo, formerly
27 Make 11 into 10, say
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33 *Added to a thread of similar posts, (3)*
35 *Ahab's mate, (4)*
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43 What wins games, according to a famed sports saying
44 Freedom Tower site
46 Musical interval
47 Indian honorific
50 Doesn't need anything else
51 Former DnD publisher
54 Hydrocarbon suffixes
55 To be in France...
56 Grafton's "___ for Killer"
58 RR stop

Seven Questions with Freddi Mitchell '25, women's water polo

By JACK McGUIRE
Senior Sports Editor

Freddi Mitchell '25, originally from Chicago, is serving as one of the co-captains on the women's water polo team this year.
In this edition of Seven Questions, Mitchell discusses her experience with the sport, memories with the team and favorite restaurant to eat at in Middlebury.

Jack McGuire: How long have you been playing water polo? What is your experience with the sport?

Freddi Mitchell: So I started playing water polo when I was in middle school. We had this thing called Little League water polo, and my best friend and I were like, this seems cool. We like to swim. So we joined, and at first it really wasn't a blast. I didn't like it too much. So then I stopped playing for a bit, and then Covid-19 came around, and I joined my high school water polo team my senior year, because it was either that or playing softball, and my friends were playing water polo. And it just happened, naturally.

JM: How did you get started playing at Midd?

FM: I went up to their table at the club fair. They kind of intimidated me at the club fair, but they were actually super awesome. I went to one of the co-ed practices in the fall. So I joined during, like, what's technically, the men's season, and they were all super welcoming.

JM: What made you stick with the team?

FM: Just the culture. Our coach, Brian, is really involved in not only us getting better at water polo, but also our lives. He gives really good advice for what we want to do next. I feel like the seniors when I was a freshman were super welcoming. It's also a good way to get your aggression out.

JM: Do you have any specific fond memories with the Middlebury team?

FM: My freshman year, we went back to the national championship. We got third, which was good, but that was really cool to be part of a team with such talented players. Especially now looking back on that, what was cool was just the sheer talent that we had that year and the mentorship was a really great experience. And also, every year we go on a spring break training trip to Florida, and that's always a blast. It's a great way to bond with the team.

JM: Do you have any personal or team goals for this season?

FM: I think our big team goal is to try to win our division or take a shot at it. I really think we have a great team, one of the best teams we have had since my freshman year. I think the group of captains alongside me, like Teddy Parkinson '25.5 and Rivinka De Silva '26 are great water polo players. We kind of fill in the gaps and we cater to each other's strengths and weaknesses. So where I might lack a skill, someone is there to pick that up. So I think that's something I'm really proud about about this team. Chances are

COURTESY PHOTO / COLLEGIATE WATER POLO ASSOCIATION
Freddi Mitchell '25 throws the ball during a water polo match.

if we win our division, we could go back to the national championship. So I think that's potentially a goal. That and just having a fun time out there.

JM: How often do you guys compete and how could someone watch you guys play?

FM: We have three tournaments a semester, and one or two of them are home tournaments. So if you want to see us, our first home tournament this year is March 1-2 in the natatorium. We have an Instagram. You're welcome to follow @middwwapo, and we play about three games a day. It depends on the tournament.

JM: What's your favorite restaurant to eat at in town?

FM: I wish I could say Gritty McDuff's in Freeport, Maine because we go there when we play Bowdoin and Bates, but I went to Sabai last night, so I want to say Sabai, but I actually think it's Tindia. Just the buffet on Sundays is great.

WOMEN'S HOCKEY ASSERTS DOMINANCE IN STATEMENT WEEKEND AGAINST #3 AMHERST

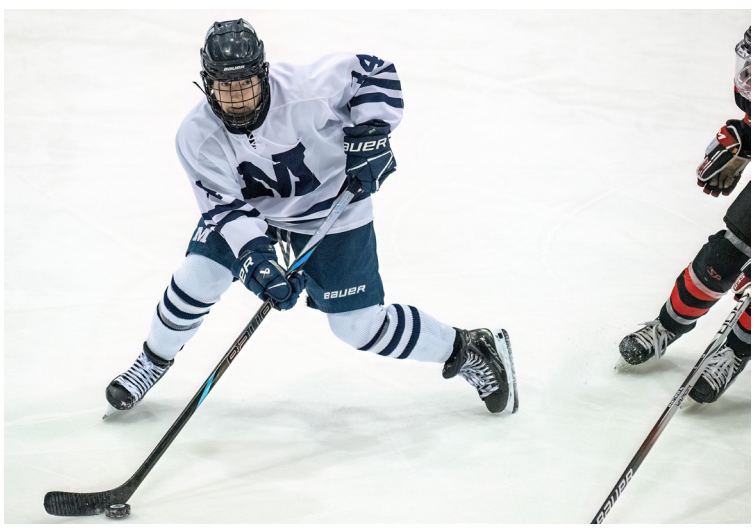
By TING CUI
Sports Editor

In front of an electric Kenyon Arena crowd, the top-ranked Middlebury women's hockey team showcased its depth and resilience against #3 Amherst College this past weekend in a crucial game of the NESCAC series.

The Panthers secured a shootout victory after Friday's 1–1 tie before claiming a convincing 3–1 win on Saturday, marking their first victory over the Mammoths since the 2022 NESCAC Championship.

"There's truly nothing like Kenyon Arena home ice advantage," said forward Meg Simon '26. "It was such a cool feeling seeing so many familiar faces in the stands — my classmates, golf teammates, both my J-Term and Econ professors, our friends from the Yellow House, and even the little girls we volunteer skate with. The support we have from the town of Middlebury makes playing here so meaningful."

Friday's contest saw early action with Avery McInerny '26 finding the net off a setup from Raia Schluter '25 eight minutes into the first period, but Amherst quickly responded five minutes later to tie the score 1–1 and force an eventual overtime. Despite a near game-winner from Sabrina Kim '25 that was waved off in overtime, the Panthers maintained their composure.



COURTESY PHOTO / WILL COSTELLO
Cece Ziegler picked up the game winner in Saturday's match against Amherst College.

"Unfortunately you can't control waved off goals, so we all were trying to stay positive by cheering everyone on to put another puck in the net," Simon said. "There are a lot of injuries on the team right now, so the depth of our team was important."

The Panthers played without Zoe Pincelli '26 and Molly MacQueen '25 this weekend, who were both injured earlier in the season.

In the ensuing shootout, Cece Ziegler '25 stepped up with the first goal to break the tie.

"I didn't feel too much pressure because I knew my coaches had confidence in me, and it is something we had practiced many times. We have incredible goalies on our team, so getting to practice against them prepared me well for the moment," Ziegler said.

Goalie Sophia Merageas '24.5 stopped two of three attempts by the Mammoths for a 2–1 edge as the teams ended the game with shared points in the NESCAC standings.

Saturday's rematch saw the Panthers assert their dominance early, with Kate Flynn '27 opening the scoring. Ziegler then delivered what would prove to be the game-winner early in the second period, crediting her team for a great set up for the shot.

"It started with Raia Schluter. She had great speed and pressure to force the Amherst defender to turn it over," Ziegler said. "Flynn gathered the puck, and had great poise. I saw space around the top of the circle and Kate made an awesome pass to me. Then both Raia and Avery McInerny did an amazing job to screen the goalie and take her eyes away which opened up a lane for me to shoot the puck."

The weekend's success highlighted not just individual performances but also the team's detailed preparation. According to Ziegler, the Panthers spent the week focusing on the "little things" that would make a difference against a top-ranked opponent like Amherst. Their effort, grit, and attention to detail – especially blocking shots – proved to be the difference maker in the series.

The Panthers rank first in the conference, but the pressure from this ranking hasn't fazed the team's approach.

"Being number one definitely adds more attention, but our team is taking our schedule one game at a time," Simon said. "We have a good, deep group with a lot of talent so that is where our confidence comes from."

Looking ahead, Middlebury continues its five-game homestand with a series against #10 Bowdoin College (10–1) next weekend. The Panthers look to maintain their momentum, focusing on what Simon described as communication, discipline and poise. With their depth, talent and strong team culture, this Middlebury squad appears prepared for continued success as they defend their top ranking.

MEN'S BASKETBALL REMAINS OPTIMISTIC DESPITE RECENT STRUGGLES

By JONATHAN BUCHHOLZ
Sports Editor

After a six game winning streak, the men's basketball team has struggled to continue their success, winning just two of their most recent 11 games. Despite their struggles, the team remains hopeful.

Captains Sam Stevens '25 and Evan Flaks '26 cited injury as a major reason for the recent losses. On a team of 14 players, four are currently injured. At the moment, Kuba Cwalina '27, Ian Murray '27, Edward Witherington '26 and Jackson McKersie '26 are all out of commission, creating an unstable lineup, game to game.

"Our lineup has constantly been shifting around so our success is not exactly where we have expected it to be or wanted to be," Flaks said.

Even though the Panthers have fallen short in their past five games, each by a deficit greater than 10 points, the team still believes they can turn around the rest of the season. When asked about what separates championship-winning teams from the rest of the pack, Flaks cited intangibles, like team cohesion, trust and communication as reasons why some teams win and others lose. He says that under the right conditions, a team that might not have the most talent can find more success than teams that do, citing last season's Trinity College Bantams who won the NESCAC Championship and made it to the final four of the Division III Men's Basketball Championship.

COURTESY PHOTO / WILL COSTELLO
Cece Ziegler picked up the game winner in Saturday's match against Amherst College.

"It's the teams that really, really play together on defense and always have each other's backs and are in constant communication and constantly disciplined [that win championships]. The best example of that was Trinity last year, who won our league and made it to the national final four," Flaks said. "They did not have the most talented roster from our league, nor the biggest, nor the strongest, but they really played together and they played a really tough defense. They had a lot of success with it."

This year's captains have been on a team that has competed as one one of the best in the country. When Stevens was a sophomore and Flaks was a first-year in the 2022–2023 season, Middlebury was ranked as high as third that season and beat two teams ranked in the top ten, not only in the same week, but away from their home court at Pepin Gymnasium. In order to turn this season around, the captains will need to bring the intangibles, like team cohesion, trust, and communication from the 2022–2023 season into this one.

The team's hope to still win the NESCAC Championship is not unfounded. The Middlebury men's basketball team's season has certain parallels to the NESCAC Championship winning team from two seasons ago. In the 2022–2023 season, the Colby Mules also started off on a strong winning streak before losing five games to NESCAC opponents. Despite the mid-season losses, the team was able to pivot and win the NESCAC title.

The Panthers hope to have a similar comeback story this season and are most certainly not giving up hope. As the captains concluded their time with The Campus, they reiterated that they believe their season is very much alive and asked students to do the same by showing their support at games.

"We're just going to keep having faith in what we're building," Stevens said. "It would be great to get support from other people."